

To Infinity and Beyond!

Written by Cadet Amn 1st Class Taggart Edgell

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This article was submitted to me after the Sumter Composite Squadron visited the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, 16 Jan 2010. I would like to thank my Senior Officers for there support of this trip as well as all those who helped us make it possible as well.

Larry K. Nelson, Major, CAP

Director of Aerospace Education (DAE)

By C/A1 Taggart Edgell

"3...2...1... We have lift-off!" Many a time, these famous words have been uttered as American spacecraft rise off the launch pad at Kennedy Space Center and begin their journey to destinations varying from the incinerating heat of the Sun to the sub-arctic temperatures of Neptune and the far reaches of our solar system.

It was here that Alan Shepard took off in his Redstone rocket and became the first American in space. It was here that John Glenn was launched in his Friendship 7 spacecraft, becoming the first American to orbit the earth.

It was here that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were rocketed into space aboard their Saturn V rocket in an attempt to land on the moon.

It is here that the Sumter, SC CAP squadron "launched" our day on January 16th.

As with all great missions, something goes wrong somewhere, whether big or small.

Twenty miles from our overnight quarters a master alarm went off, in the form of a loud pop from the rear of the vehicle, warning that our squadron van had blown a tire.

Fortunately, disaster was averted and we were back on track only 90 minutes delayed, and one vehicle short.

Undeterred by near catastrophe, the group arrived at Kennedy Space Center the following day, without further mishap. First stop was the Robot Scouts exhibit, detailing NASA's robot

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program and the systems reaching out into the depths of our solar system.

Robots that are going to be billions of miles from earth exploring out past Mars and Saturn need to have the ability to function on their own.

NASA does this with cutting edge technologies enabling the robots to fix themselves and overcome almost any problem or obstacle independently.

Currently, there are two rovers, Spirit and Opportunity, exploring the vast plains of Mars.

Unfortunately, Spirit has been stuck in the sand for over 10 months, and after many futile attempts to dislodge the stricken robot, NASA has declared it a stationary science platform.

Despite its immobile status, the Spirit rover continues to provide critical information that will be needed if humans are ever going to live on the red planet.

One of the highlights of the day was the Shuttle Launch Experience simulator. It is a realistic simulator that recreates the sights and sounds of a real Shuttle launch.

After the instructor's commentary, visitors walk onto the platform positioned in the Space Shuttle's cargo bay and strap into your astronaut seat.

As the countdown winds down, "3 . . .

2 . . . 1 . . .," the seats start shaking as the solid rocket boosters and main engines of the Shuttle ignite.

The vehicle rockets out of the atmosphere into space and shudders as the boosters and fuel tank are jettisoned and the shuttle arrives in its low-earth orbit.

It is so realistic the rider experiences near-weightless conditions and a slight bit of fear!

Another highlight was the 3D IMAX film, "Magnificent Desolation: Walking on the Moon". This presentation gives an in-depth look at Apollo missions 11 through 17, with breathtaking scenes of Neil Armstrong and others walking on the moon. The scene that really makes a person jump is when the astronaut sends chunks of moon rock hurtling straight at the viewer.

It was such a startling scene that some viewers were cowering behind their seats (though not the brave Civil Air Patrol Cadets of Sumter Composite Squadron)!

One of the most awe-inspiring things at the visitor complex is the Rocket Garden. Almost every rocket that NASA has used is on display there: from the Redstone and Jupiter rockets to the famous Saturn V and Delta rockets.

It is a sight that one does not soon forget.

It is an unforgettable look into the past, revealing just how far America has progressed from the early day of space exploration.

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The unexpected adventures only added the experience as a whole. The visit to Kennedy Space Center was a thoroughly captivating experience and Every one of the 16 cadets and 7 senior members that made the trip returned to Sumter with inspiration about Aerospace Education that can be summed up in four words: "To Infinity and Beyond!"